

**Connecticut General Assembly
Education Committee**

**Testimony on House Bill 6654
By Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski
Hartford Public Schools**

Monday, March 16, 2009

Chairman Gaffey, Chairman Fleischman; Vice Chairs, Sen. Fonfara and Representative Reynolds; Ranking members Sen. Caliguiri and Representative Giuliano and distinguished members of the Connecticut General Assembly Education Committee –

Good afternoon. I want to begin by thanking the Committee for the support it has given Hartford Public Schools as we work to create a system of high-performing schools of choice.

I also want thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill No. 6654, which establishes a resident teacher certificate for teachers who participate in alternate route programs to certification.

I trust you are aware that last year Hartford Public Schools scored the highest gains in student achievement of any Connecticut City on the 2007-2008 Connecticut Mastery Tests, more than three times the state average rate of growth. This was a very real step

toward closing the State's largest-in-the nation achievement gap. It was, moreover, Hartford's first significant increase in seven years.

The District also raised the four-year graduation rate by seven percentage points. We opened 11 new academies this year and our School Board has approved five more for 2009-2010 – all of them aligned to future job growth in the state.

Our quarterly formative testing indicators point to a second consecutive year of improved student achievement.

Our success is attributable to a reform strategy that aligns multiple factors to produce more robust school effects. Teacher quality is one of the most important factors, followed by school leadership. Quality in both these areas is a relative condition and requires a broad rather than a narrow pipeline. Connecticut already has narrowed its teacher candidate pipeline by refusal to participate in the Inter-State Compact and setting a higher cut score on the Praxis exam than neighboring states. The effect is greatest on urban school districts.

In this context, we have benefited from the presence of 60 teachers who are Teach for America (TFA) corps members. Existing law allows anyone entering the teaching profession by an alternate route 90 days to complete the requirements for a certificate. Our school principals report that TFA corps members in Hartford have had a remarkably positive effect on student achievement. National studies show that students of Teach for America teachers, on average, tend to make more growth in one year in core subject areas than do students of teachers who enter the profession in the traditional fashion. We urge

the State Department of Education to examine these results and conduct a similar study of students taught by Connecticut TFA corps members.

Teach for America recruits, selects, trains and provides ongoing professional development to graduates of many of the best universities in the country, who are committed to closing the achievement gap by teaching students in low-income urban areas, such as Hartford.

All of the TFA candidates meet the "highly qualified" teacher requirements set forth in the federal No Child Left Behind Act and applicable state law.

Removing the 90-day grace period alone, as has been proposed by the Connecticut Department of Education, would make it impossible for Teach for America to operate in our State. Were that to happen, Hartford's efforts to close the achievement gap would be further blunted by regulation that is meaningful only to institutional interests.

Replacing the current law with the legislation before you today, enables the State Board of Education to establish a Resident Teacher Certificate that would allow Teach for America corps members to earn their certificate over the course of a year. It would also allow Connecticut to compete with other states, such as New York, that compete with us for talented teachers.

Finally, I wish to point out that the Hartford community has made a large commitment to have TFA corps members supplement our teaching ranks. The cost of training and development of each corps member is approximately \$20,000. The District pays \$3,000

per teacher. The remainder, \$17,000 per teacher, must be raised by the community. Our donors have so far contributed almost \$500,000 of non-public funds for this purpose. This ranges from individuals and small businesses that sponsor a single corps member, to large corporations and philanthropies, such as: the Hartford Financial Services Group, which has committed \$1 million over five years and the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, which has committed another \$300,000 over three years, in support of TFA Hartford. At full capacity, the program will carry a total cost of \$1.7M per year for up to 100 TFA teachers toward which Hartford Public Schools will contribute \$300,000. I hope that as long as you serve in legislature, you would never allow state regulation to deny this type of support for the improvement of public education.

I urge you to adopt the Resident Teacher Certificate legislation before you. The Hartford Schools ask you for nothing more or less than equity in state finance and the ability to compete. Your efforts to create that level playing field and enable us to raise student achievement without unnecessary bureaucratic constraints are, in our view, the proper role of state government. Your efforts in these areas are valued and appreciated by all in our City devoted to closing Connecticut's achievement gap, and particularly helpful in these most challenging economic times.

Thank you again, for the opportunity to share my perspective on this important issue.

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